



Student work by Megan, acrylic paint, 2019.

Supporting Equity

Melissa Purtee

Equity is a huge issue in education, and if your school isn't talking about it yet, chances are they will be soon. Different from equality, which involves giving everyone the same thing, equity involves giving individual students what they need to be successful. This involves working to make sure that things like family income, race, or gender aren't obstacles to receiving a quality education, as well as giving all kids access to challenging, meaningful content. Our art programs have huge potential to help make all students feel welcome, valued, and challenged in school, especially when we reflect on our practice through an equity lens. Here are three ideas that can add to what you already do to support equity in your classroom:

1. Share a Range of Artists

Do all your students have regular access to examples of professional artists who look like them? Are they challenged to examine issues from multiple points of view? For many years, my answer to these questions would have

been "no." That changed when, years ago, a student asked me why we only learned about artists of color during Black History Month. I realized that I needed to do better in including diverse artists in each lesson I taught. Since there are so many amazing artists I want to share and such limited instructional time, I developed my "Rule of Three," and started including three artists in all of my lessons, with no more than one of them being a white male. This practice gave my students examples of a range of artists and exposed them to multiple perspectives, making classroom content better for everyone in the process.

2. Look at Art with Open-Ended Questions

Like many of you, when I learned about art in my university classes, it was presented more as information to memorize than something to make personal connections to. This experience influenced my teaching for years until I learned about Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) through a fellowship at the

North Carolina Museum of Art. VTS creates engaging dialogue by looking at work through open-ended questions that support inquiry and personal connections. VTS supports equity, as well

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as engagement and understanding of content, because it welcomes students' diverse experiences, perceptions, and connections in classroom discussions.

3. Allow Personal Points of View

To really connect to learning, students need ample opportunities to share and process information through a personal lens. This includes life experiences, beliefs, values, and opinions—basically what makes each of us unique. When we ask students to use their own ideas

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Why Equity?
 Equity is a fundamental concept in education. It means that every student has the opportunity to succeed. This is not always the case in our schools. Some students have more resources than others. Some students have more support than others. Some students have more opportunities than others. Equity means that every student has the same opportunities to succeed. This is not always the case in our schools. Some students have more resources than others. Some students have more support than others. Some students have more opportunities than others. Equity means that every student has the same opportunities to succeed.

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as the starting point for art-making, we center individual expression in our teaching and individualized learning outcomes. The more choice we provide in our classrooms, the more students are able to connect to the work they are doing in a personally meaningful way. When I started increasing the amount of student choice in my classroom, I noticed increased engagement and retention of information. I also learned so much more about who my students are as individuals, which helps form increasingly positive relationships with even the hardest to reach students.

Room for Success

As art teachers, we can support equity for all students by using these three strategies to individualize content for our students. When we leave lots of room in our lessons for who students are, where they've been, and what they think, we not only help them learn our content deeply, we make our schools places where everyone can be valued and successful.

Melissa Purtee is an art teacher at Apex High School in Apex, North Carolina, and co-author of The Open Art Room, available from Davis Publications.



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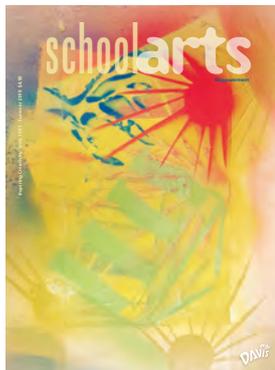
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